



Hartlepool
Borough Council

Children's Services Committee Agenda

29 September 2026

Time: 4.00 pm

Location: Council Chamber

Members: Children's Services Committee

Councillors Anderson, Cowie (VC), Dunbar, B Harrison, Holbrook, Lindridge (C) and Napper

Parish Council Representatives: Kiara Hutchinson (Elwick Parish Council) and Chris Robson, Dalton Piercy Parish Council)

Co-opted Members: Gillian Hood, C of E Diocese and Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese representatives.

School Heads Representatives: Adam Palmer (Secondary), Sue Sharpe (Primary), Zoe Westley (Special).

Parent Governor Representative: Martin Pout

Six Young Peoples Representatives

Observer: Councillor Wiley, Chair of Adult Services and Public Health Committee

1. Apologies for absence

2. To receive any declarations of interest by members

3. Minutes

- 3.1 To receive the Minutes and Decision Record in respect of the meeting held on 30 June 2026 (previously published and circulated).

CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone. The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.



4. Budget And Policy Framework Items

None

5. Key Decisions

None

6. Other Items Requiring Decision

None

7. Items for information

7.1 Education – Children with a social worker – *Executive Director for Children's Services*

8. Any other business which the chair considers urgent

For Information

Date of next meeting –3 November at 4.00pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Hartlepool.



Children's Services Committee

29 September 2026

Report of: Executive Director of Children's Services
Subject: Education - Children with a Social Worker
Decision Type: For information

1. Council Plan Priority

Hartlepool will be a place:
where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)

2. Purpose of Report

2.1. To provide information on the education of children in Hartlepool who have a social worker. This includes those who are open to Hartlepool Social Care under a Child in Need¹ Plan or those identified as Child Protection².

3. Background

3.1. A Virtual School is a local authority service that works to promote and improve the educational outcomes of some of the most vulnerable children and young people. Originally established to support children in care and previously looked-after children, the role of the Virtual School has expanded to include strategic oversight of children with a social worker and, more recently, children in kinship care arrangements. The Virtual School does not operate as a physical school; instead, it acts as a champion for vulnerable pupils, working collaboratively with schools, social care, health services and other professionals to ensure that children receive the support they need to achieve their full educational potential.

¹ Section 17 Children Act 1989

² Section 47 Children Act 1989

Through strategic leadership, training, advice, challenge and advocacy, the Virtual School seeks to remove barriers to learning, promote inclusion, and improve attendance, attainment and wider educational outcomes.

3.2. From September 2021, Virtual Schools were given responsibility for the strategic oversight of children with a social worker, recognising that this group is particularly vulnerable to poorer educational outcomes. This extended role applies to children and young people aged 0 to 18 who are currently receiving, or have previously received, support from a social worker due to safeguarding or welfare concerns, including those subject to Child in Need or Child Protection plans. The Virtual School's role is not to provide direct case management for individual children, but to act as a strategic leader and champion for their education by promoting high aspirations, improving attendance and engagement, reducing exclusions, supporting partnership working between education, social care and other agencies, and helping schools understand and address the barriers these children may face in achieving positive educational outcomes.

3.3. The new responsibilities for the Virtual School Head have given them a strategic leadership role to champion the education of children with a social worker by:

- Making visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities, including with children's social care, to help all agencies hold high aspirations for these children
- Promoting practice that supports children's engagement in education, recognising that attending an education setting is an important factor in helping to keep children safe from harm
- Levelling up children's outcomes to narrow the attainment gap so every child has the opportunity to reach their potential – including helping to ensure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover educationally from the impact of the pandemic

3.4. While there is no single cause for the poor educational outcomes for children with a social worker, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are associated with poorer educational attainment, reduced engagement, and greater educational disadvantage³. Children with a social worker are more likely to have experienced complex family circumstances; some may have been at risk of, or have suffered, physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect.

³ Factors influencing secondary school pupils' educational outcomes – Department for Education September 2024

3.5. At home, they may have lived in families where there is domestic abuse, mental ill-health, or substance misuse. Outside of the home, they may be at risk of extra-familial harms, such as experiencing criminal or sexual exploitation or serious violence. Data from the Children's Commissioner's Stability Index (2024) shows that children with a social worker are much more likely to experience frequent transitions, including moving home or school and experience changes in the professionals that are supporting them and their families.

3.6. Despite the challenges that children with a social worker face, with the right support, the aspirations of these children can be raised, and they can go on to achieve more than their peers.

3.7. The Guidance states that Virtual Heads through their flexible leadership approach should ensure that the following '*critical activities*'⁴ are included:

- Enhancing partnerships between education settings and the local authority so agencies can work together in a child focused manner
- Identifying the needs of the cohort and addressing barriers to poor educational outcomes to ensure pupils make educational progress.
- Offering advice and support to key professionals such as social workers, designated safeguarding leads (DSLs), designated teachers, and school leaders to help children make progress, including through increasing their confidence in using evidence-based interventions.

3.8. Critical Activity 1: Enhancing Partnerships

Within Hartlepool we are fortunate that our continued relational approach has built positive foundations to the relationships between education providers and the local authority. Prior to the implementation of the statutory guidance, Hartlepool Virtual School had for many years extended its remit to supporting 'vulnerable children'. This has led to positive regard for the service and the advice, support and guidance offered to families, social workers and educational practitioners.

The Virtual School has been pivotal in supporting relationships between education establishments, social care and wider professionals through:

- Attendance and input at Hartlepool Inclusion Panel – a multi-agency panel to support vulnerable children across Hartlepool

⁴ [Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK](#) Department for Education 5 March 2024 p

- Expansion of Hartlepool Inclusion Panel to include 'Prevention panels' – a Home Office pilot to support children and young people at risk of becoming involved in crime
- Social workers invited to Designated Teacher meetings to allow for more collegiate working and networking opportunities
- Training for social workers in relation to education policy and procedures
- Training for schools regarding understanding social care thresholds, policy and procedures
- Drop-in sessions for all social workers supporting any aspect of education
- Professional supervisions sessions for 'care teams' working with children facilitated by the Virtual School
- Professional supervisions and staff consultations for schools
- Training for Kinship carers
- Fortnightly Multi agency Virtual School triage meetings to discuss support for individuals and schools
- Virtual School representation within Youth Justice Team and Staying Close service
- Links with LA EP team to ensure they are aware which children are previously cared for, living in kinship arrangements and/ or have a social worker
- Strong links with other education teams including SEN, Inclusion, Attendance and Admissions

3.9. Critical Activity 2: Identifying the Needs of the Cohort

Data Sharing

As a Virtual School we have continued to work hard to ensure that we have access to data to enable analysis of:

- Attendance
- Suspension and exclusion rates
- Overlaps with other disadvantages
e.g. Free School meals, Special Educational needs
- Attainment
- Safeguarding

This reciprocal sharing of data between the local authority and schools ensures that the cohort of children with a social worker and those under kinship care agreements are a focus for all.

3.10. Identify cohort's needs and address barriers to education

Educational data is collected for all children who are Child Protection or Child in Need on a termly basis. This data is not available for the whole kinship cohort due to the requirement for families to self-report their kinship status.

This data is provided by schools and analysed by the Virtual School to identify the needs of the cohort, respond to need across Hartlepool and in individual schools along with targeting support to those who require it the most.

Data is collected in the following areas:

- Attendance
- Attainment – including personal progress
- Mental Health and Wellbeing

The data below shows verified data for the Academic Year 2024-25 (Summer Term 2025) and the Autumn and Spring Term 2026:

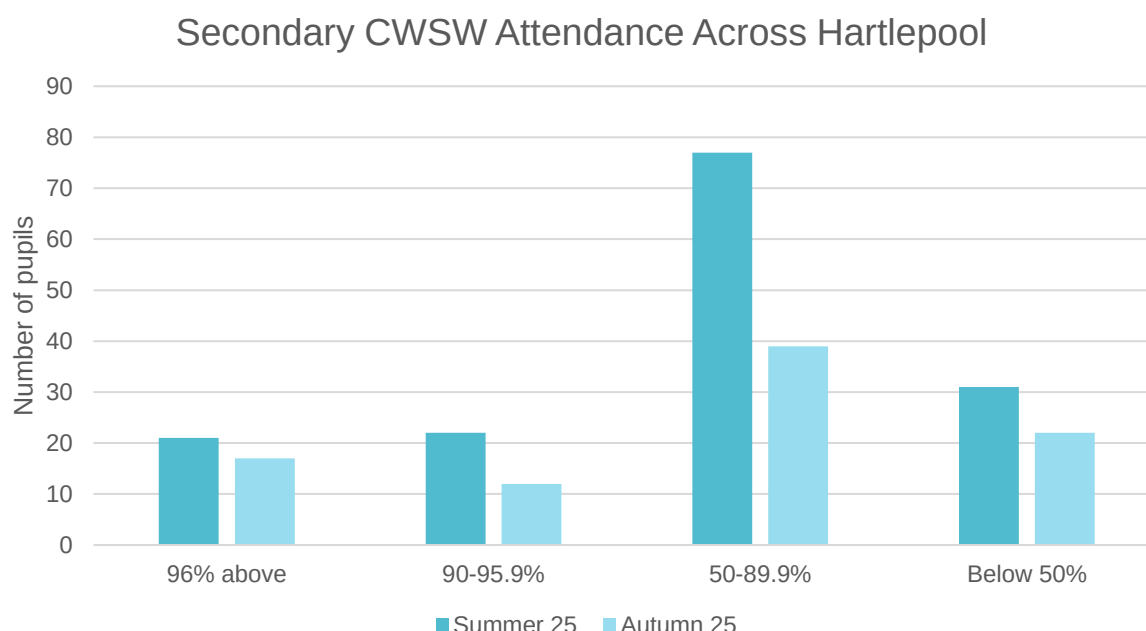
3.11. Attendance- Secondary School Pupils

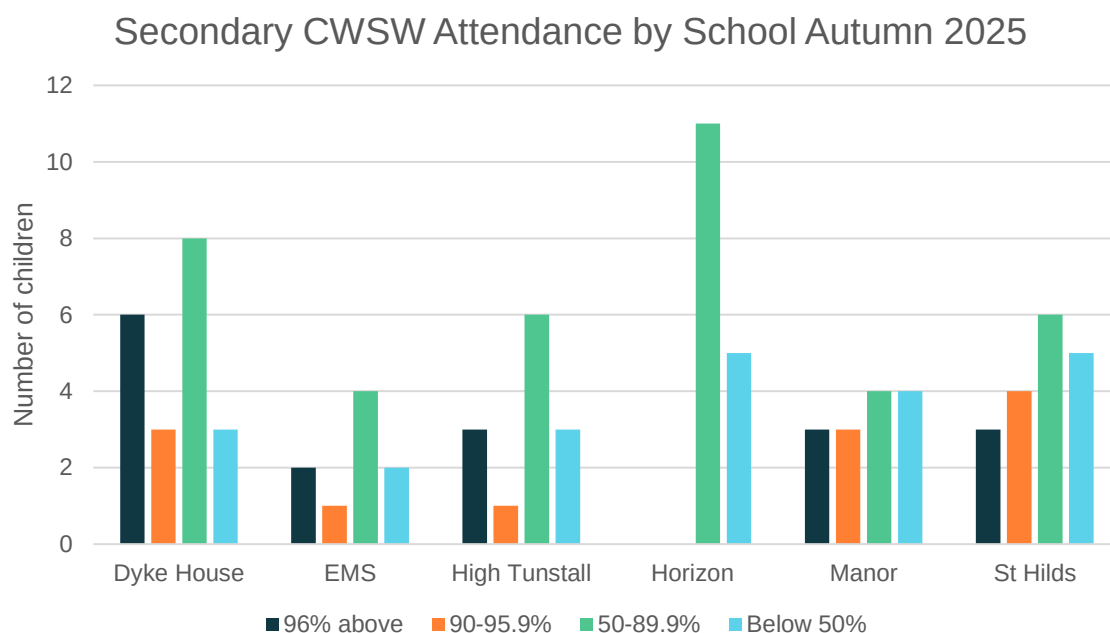
The following data was collected for the Summer term 2024-25 and Autumn 2025-26:

43% of pupils were classed as persistently absent

24% were classed as severely absent

This was a trend seen across all 5 secondary schools and the Pupil Referral Unit.





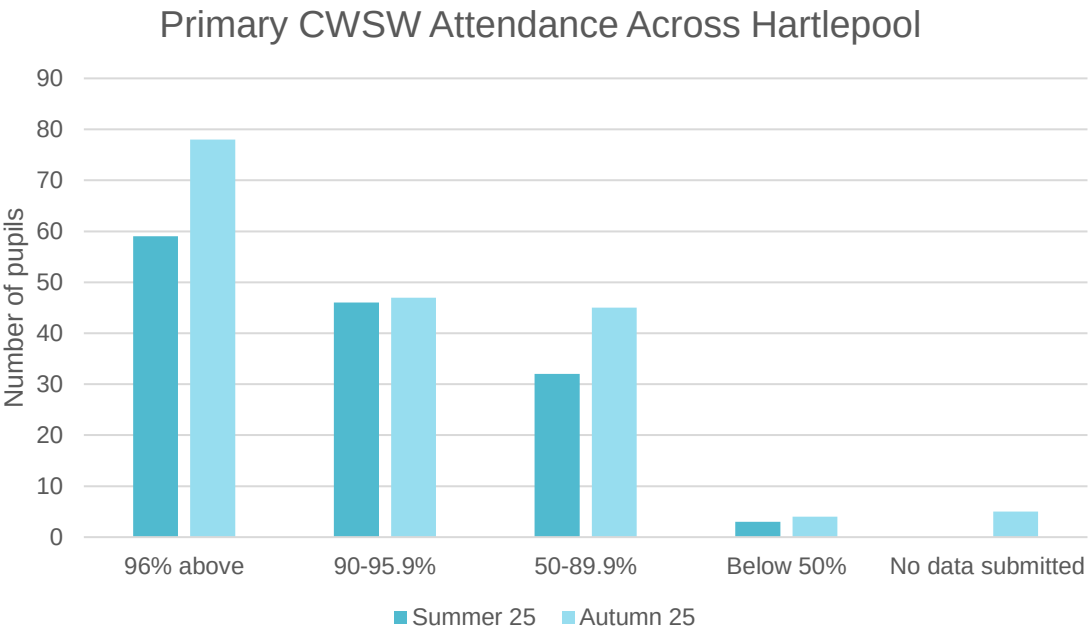
For the Autumn term attendance of the secondary cohort, only **2%** are classed as regular attenders at school⁵.

3.12. Attendance- Primary

For Primary Schools, the data below is from Summer term 24-25 and Autumn term 25-26. It is worth highlighting that the Summer term data only looked at the 5 primary schools who had the highest number of Children with a social worker. This was due to large gaps in the data we had received. Since then, the data sharing has significantly improved, meaning for Autumn term 25-26 data was obtained for almost every school.

There are some primary schools in Hartlepool who have significant numbers of children open at CIN/CP and others where there are none.

⁵ Attendance above 90%



The data clearly shows that attendance at primary school for those children on a CIN/CP plan is better than at secondary school, with **69%** of children attending school on a regular basis in the Summer term, rising to **76%** in the Autumn term. There are significantly lower numbers for persistent and severe absence.

3.13. Primary Attendance data by school

The data below shows the individual school data for the Autumn Term 2025 for the 179 children with a social worker at that time. The schools highlighted in grey had no children subject to CIN/CP at the time of data collection. The figures below show the percentage of the whole school cohort of CIN/CP that fall into each attendance bracket.

	Above 96%	90- 95.9%	50- 89.9%	Below 50%	No data submitted
Barnard Grove					
Brougham	50	25	25	0	
Clavering	85.7	14.3	0	0	
Eldon Grove	75	25	0	0	
Eskdale	0	100	0	0	
Fens					
Golden Flatts	25	25	50	0	
Grange	41.6	16.7	33.3	8.3	
Greatham	25	25	50	0	
Hart and St Peters					100
Holy Trinity	100	0	0	0	
Jesmond Gardens	16.7	25	58.3	0	
Kingsley	31.25	12.5	56.25	0	
Lynnfield	53.8	30.8	0	15.4	
Rift House	20	60	20	0	
Rossmere					100
Sacred Heart	25	25	50	0	
Springwell	61.5	15.4	15.4	7.7	
St Aidens	42.8	7.1	50	0	
St Bega's	75	25	0	0	
St Cuthberts	100	0	0	0	
St Helen's	0	50	50	0	
St John Vianney	66.7	33.3	0	0	
St Joseph's					
St Teresa's	83.3	16.7	0	0	
Stranton	44.5	33.3	22.2	0	
Throston	25	75	0	0	
Ward Jackson	33.3	66.7	0	0	
West Park					
West View	38.9	50	11.1	0	

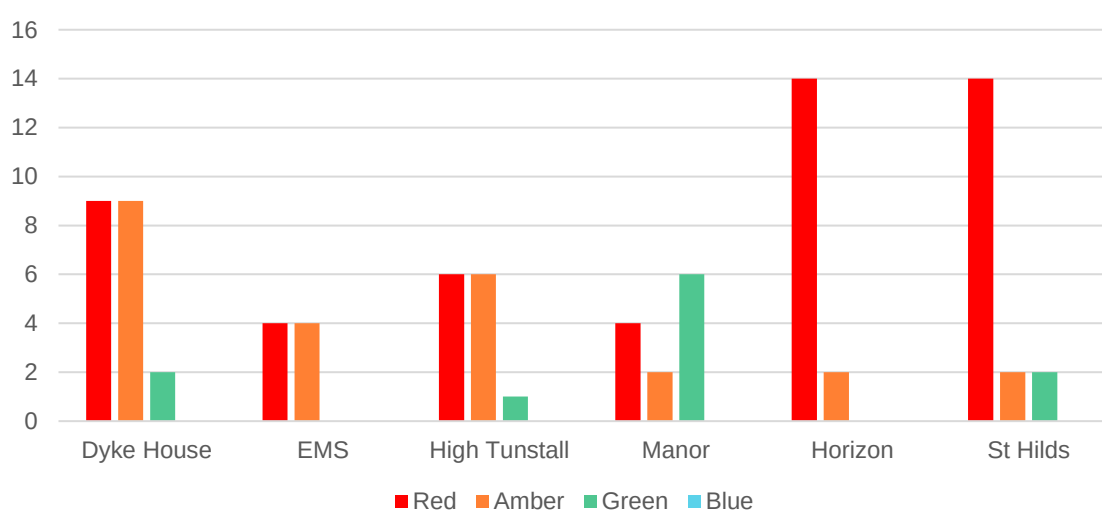
3.14. Attainment- Secondary

Attainment data is collected for English, Maths and Science. Schools identify whether students are:

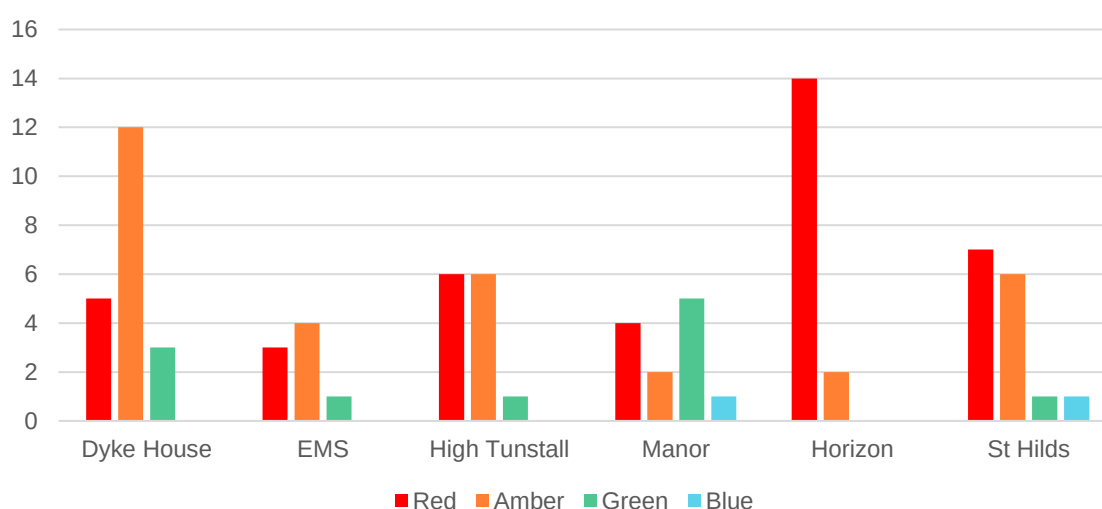
- Red: Working **Below** National Expectations
- Amber: Working **Towards** National Expectations
- Green: Working **at** National Expectations
- Blue: Working **Above** National Expectations

The following charts show the attainment across Hartlepool Secondary Schools for Autumn term 25-26:

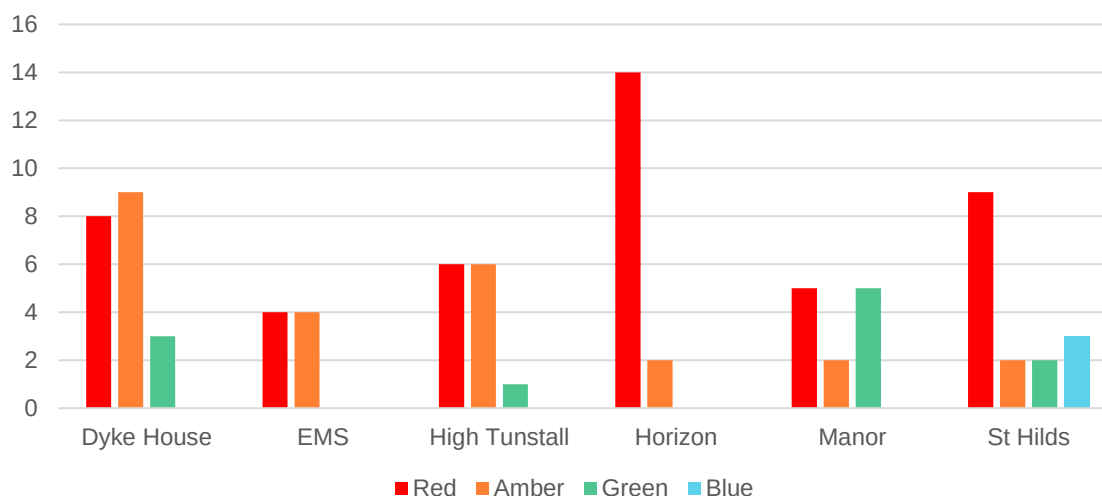
Attainment data English



Attainment data Maths



Attainment data Science



Across all 3 core subjects in Secondary schools, children with a social worker are predominantly working below or towards National Expectations:

Subject	% of primary aged Children with Social Worker cohort working at or above National Expectations
English	12.2
Maths	14.4
Science	15.5

3.15. As so many children with a social worker are attaining below National Expectations, we wanted to ensure that we captured the relative progress they are making. As such, schools are asked to report on the children's 'Personal Progress'⁶.

School identify which students are:

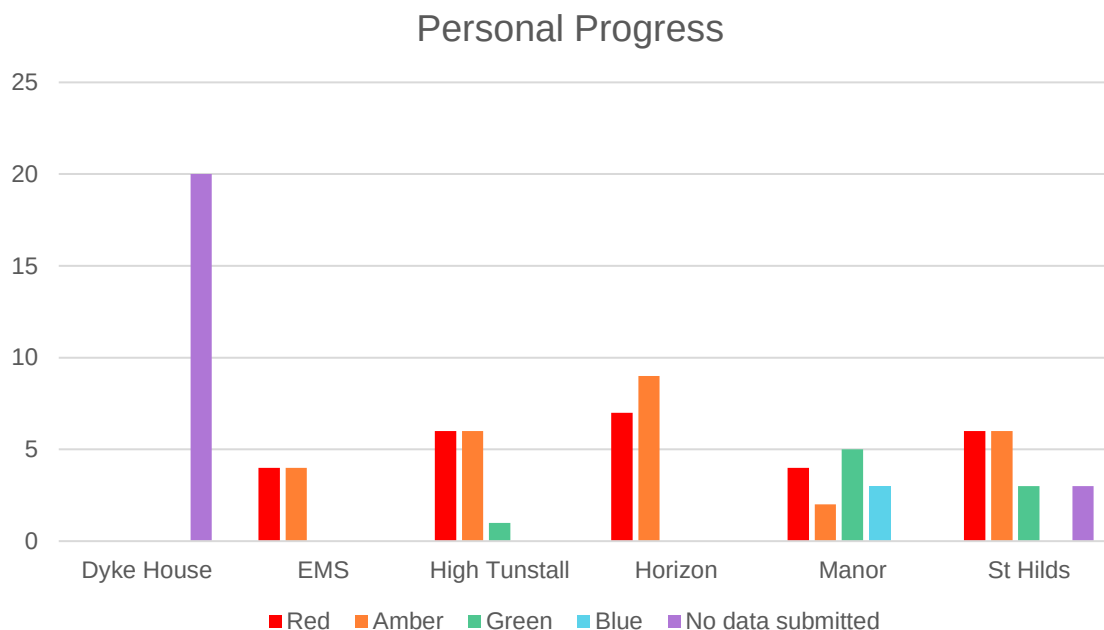
Red: Has made **no** personal progress

Amber: Has made **limited** personal progress

Green: Has made **expected** personal progress

Blue: Has made **significant** personal progress

⁶ Progress made from a child's own starting point - not against National Expectations



Only **13.3%** of children with a social worker have made personal progress in the Autumn Term.

3.16. Attainment- Primary

For Primary schools, we collect Attainment data for Reading, Writing, Maths and Science.

Schools identify which students are:

Red: Working **Below** National Expectations

Amber: Working **Towards** National Expectations

Green: Working **at** National Expectations

Blue: Working **Above** National Expectations

3.17. The percentage of the Primary aged Children with a social worker cohort working at or above national expectations are as follows;

Subject	% of primary aged Children with Social Worker cohort working at or above National Expectations
Reading	36.9
Writing	35.6
Maths	39.1
Science	36.3

As so many children with a social worker are attaining below National Expectations we wanted to understand where children are making progress.

As such, schools are asked to report on the children's 'Personal Progress'⁷, identifying which students are:

Red: Has made **no** personal progress

Amber: Has made **limited** personal progress

Green: Has made **expected** personal progress

Blue: Has made **significant** personal progress

Data provided by schools shows **50%** of primary aged children with a social worker have made personal progress in the Autumn term 2025.

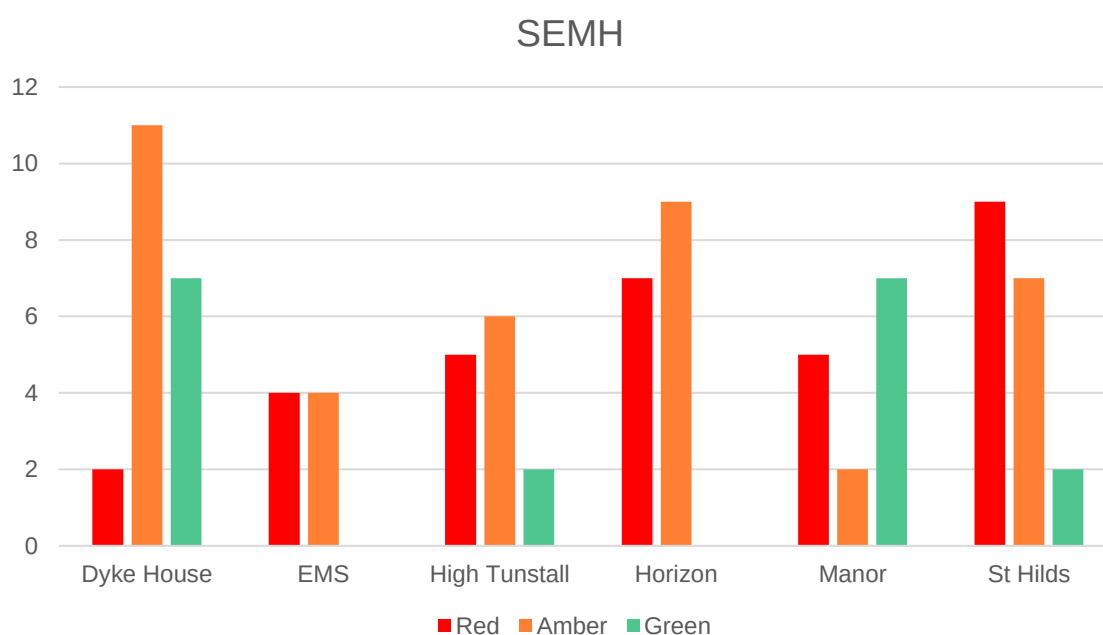
3.18. Mental Health and Wellbeing- Secondary

Schools are requested to provide information on the 'Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)' of the cohort by reporting as to whether the children's SEMH is:

Red: **Significant** cause for concern

Amber: **Some** cause for concern

Green: **No** concerns



3.19. For **20%** of the secondary aged CIN/ CP cohort there are no concerns in relation to their Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs. This identifies a significant cohort of children where school have concerns regarding their emotional wellbeing (**80%**).

⁷ Progress made from a child's own starting point - not against National Expectations

3.20. Mental Health and Wellbeing- Primary

For **43.4%** of the Children with a Social Worker cohort there are no concerns in relation to their Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs. This identifies that for more than half of children with a social worker, their school has concerns regarding their emotional wellbeing (**56.6%**).

3.21. Individual Child/ School Support

Alongside the collection of cohort data, in order to ensure the needs of the cohort are known and understood, the Virtual School including the Virtual School Psychology Service offers support to all children and young people within our cohort, including children in need, children subject to child protection plans, and children in kinship care.

This support is provided as part of an early intervention approach, where schools, education settings and professionals can refer children and young people for information, advice and guidance. Referrals are triaged on a fortnightly basis by the lead psychologist in collaboration with other members of the Virtual School Senior Leadership Team.

3.22. A typical outcome of triage is an offer of support from a Virtual School education officer, which a member of the Virtual School Psychology Service may jointly contribute to through attendance at meetings, case consultation, recommending resources and strategies, and sharing psychological principles to support understanding and context.

3.23. At times, it may be agreed that a Virtual School psychologist will undertake direct work with a child or young person, following a graduated response within the Virtual School. This direct work will be contracted with the education setting and will focus on understanding barriers to education and identifying next steps for support, often through 1:1 sessions with the child or young person. Attendance at relevant meetings and a written report upon completion of the contracted work will also be provided.

3.24. Despite the guidance stating that it *'does not require virtual school heads to provide direct intervention, help, or support for individual children with a social worker or their families'* we feel that this is imperative at times to be able to provide the best support that direct work is undertaken with families and children. The team do not hold a 'case load' however do provide support to children and families where necessary.

3.25 Critical Activity 3: Offering Advice and Support to Key Professionals

The Virtual School ensures that it operates an open door for all professionals working with children in Hartlepool. This is the same for schools, education providers, social care and other professionals.

The team provide drop-in sessions for social workers to discuss individual children along with any other education relation concerns.

- 3.26. The Virtual School Psychology Service works with a range of other professionals, such as the Youth Justice Service and Social Care teams, to offer relevant theory and psychological frameworks to support their work with children with a social worker and improve educational outcomes through multi-agency working.

4. Proposals

- 4.1. Children's Services Committee are requested to note the contents of the report

5. Other Considerations/Implications

Risk Implications	None
Financial Considerations	None
Subsidy Control	None
Legal Considerations	The report contains aggregated information about children receiving statutory social care support. School-level information must be appropriately aggregated or suppressed to minimise the risk of children being identified directly or indirectly and their personal / confidential information being disclosed
Single Impact Assessment	None
Staff Considerations	None
Asset Management Considerations	None
Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change Considerations	None
Consultation	N/A- Information Only

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 It is recommendation that Children's Services Committee notes the contents of the report

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Contact Officers

Emma Rutherford
Executive Head Teacher- Vulnerable Pupils
01429 284370

Sign Off:-

Chief Executive	Date:
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 25.08.2026
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 28.08.2026